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**THEIR WAYS ARE NOT SO UNITED  
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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

### **THEIR WAYS ARE NOT SO UNITED**

This paper offers an illustration of the challenges legal services programs face in creating an outcome measurement system that satisfies multiple funders, by examining Community Legal Aid Services (CLAS) attempt to create a single outcome measurement system to satisfy the United Way agencies within its region. This paper will focus on the challenge we have faced in trying to develop an internal system of outcomes that will satisfy all of our United Way funders.

## **THEIR WAYS ARE NOT SO UNITED**

This paper offers an illustration of the challenges legal services programs face in creating an outcome measurement system that satisfies multiple funders, by examining Community Legal Aid Services (CLAS) attempt to create a single outcome measurement system to satisfy the eight different United Way agencies within its region.

When your funding sources don't agree about outcomes, how can you begin to create a unified system of outcome measurement within your own program? Community Legal Aid Services has faced this problem in its dealings with eight different United Way agencies from which it receives funding.

CLAS' region encompasses ten counties in the Central Northeast region of Ohio including Ashland, Columbiana, Mahoning, Medina, Portage, Richland, Stark, Summit, Trumbull and Wayne counties. There are three significantly sized cities within our region, Akron, Canton and Youngstown who have large urban United Way organizations. These United Ways have substantial amounts of money to distribute, and substantial bureaucracies to manage the accumulation and distribution of these amounts. Our region also includes small rural United Ways that raise smaller amounts of money and utilize minimal resources and minimal staff in distributing these resources. There are also United Ways based in bedroom communities that look to larger cities surrounding them, and strive to emulate their big city counterparts in their fundraising and administrative styles. Our region includes a United Way that serves residents of only one city and until last year had a large urban city with three different United Ways.

This paper will focus on the challenge we have faced in trying to develop an internal system of outcomes that will satisfy all of our United Way funders.

Developing Outcome Measures for use in our United Way funding applications was a fairly lengthy process. It began with different staff members, including me, attending various United Way sponsored outcome measurement trainings. I had been capturing outcomes for cases since I began as a staff attorney at the Legal Aid Society of Cincinnati in 1995, although I swear I had never heard the phrase "outcome measurement". Closing a case at Cincinnati just included choosing from a list of phrases like "prevented eviction". I never knew these were outcome measurements, never knew how (or even if) they were ever used.

However, when I arrived at CLAS in March of 2000, realized that not all legal aid's closed cases the same way. I didn't give it another thought, however, until I became the managing attorney of the Medina County office, and was asked to attend the local United Way's Outcome Measurement training. I didn't know what that meant, but I went. Unbeknownst to

me, at the same time, other members of our staff were attending similar trainings put on by other United Ways within our region.

Historically, many charities behaved as though what they did was good “a priori”. Charities do good things. We are a charity. Therefore what we do is good.<sup>1</sup> What staff, including me, learned at those trainings was that the “a priori” assumption was changing. We learned that local United Ways were being pushed to increase the accountability of the organizations to which they gave money. The overarching question being asked was whether the programs they funded really made a difference in the lives of people in the community.<sup>2</sup> And they were being asked to prove it. What was certainly made clear to a small number of CLAS staff that we were going to have to do more than count cases.

One challenge we have continually faced in dealing with United Ways is that they are typically used to funding social service agencies, which we are not, or at least not really. We have worked to find our niche in a social service world. Legal services organizations do help people, just like social service agencies, but when we try to talk about measuring what we do, the analogy just does not work. We do not do case plans or service plans. Our clients do not complete courses of treatment; there are no classes to attend. We do not do pre and post tests, although we can ask if clients feel their own knowledge increased. It is not reasonable to strive to stop the client from having another legal problem, and there is no firm and fast definition about what is a good result for clients. Winning the case certainly is no measure of success, and even if it were, we do not take cases on basis of whether the client is going to win. A major question is what is a reasonable outcome? Is it enough that the program obtained a court order or settlement, or must the client actually benefit concretely from the order? Is it sufficient to give the client legal advice and representation on an eviction, or must it actually result in the client being able to stay in his or her apartment for a specified period of time?<sup>3</sup>

In the early stages of reporting outcomes to the different United Ways, there was no attempt at uniformity in our outcome measurement system. Each United Way sponsored outcome measurement training had resulted in a logic model; one or several staff members attempt to capture what we do for clients on paper. The logic models were created for specific counties and used for the specific United Way funding applications. There was no clear philosophy of the outcomes we wished to measure.

The first step towards some level of uniformity was the recognition that we were going to need to more than count cases. But, this was only evident to only a few staff members, however. So the next step was to get the whole staff thinking about how we changed our clients’ lives. We began by asking the professional staff to think about what we achieved for clients and to create a list of what we called main benefit codes to capture those outcomes. We used models of other

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<sup>1</sup> Measuring Outcomes: Does your Organization Make a Difference, by Ernie Ginsler, Nonprofit Boards and Governance Review. March 28, 2002, p.1.

<sup>2</sup> Measuring Program Outcomes: A Practical Approach, United Way of America, p. 4.

<sup>3</sup> Accountability to LSC: Outcome Measures, Evaluations and Unintended Consequences, by Alan W. Houseman, Center for Law and Social Policy, p. 10..

such lists from other successful programs in Ohio. The codes were created by the practice area teams and then merged into one large list. The practice teams took an incredible amount of time agonizing over these codes. The list now appears as a drop down menu in Kemps and staff may choose multiple codes in closing a case. This process got us an excellent and workable means of identifying an important set of outcomes. The main benefit codes became outcome indicators for the successful resolution of cases. The process of creating the codes also increased the sense of accountability within the staff as they realized that more than the number of cases closed would be recorded.

The logic models produced by staff had also initiated modifications to CLAS' existing client satisfaction survey. Additional questions were added to try to measure an outcome of client's increased knowledge about legal rights, responsibilities and legal procedures. The survey was sent to one of every ten advice or brief service clients and to every extended service client in one county. Because we were pleased with the results of the revised survey, we began using it throughout the region.

Once we had some level of clarity about what we wanted to measure and how we would measure it, we faced another challenge, one we are struggling with today. The logic models that resulted from different United Way sponsored trainings were very different, and they illustrated several things. We found that because the staff members who attended the trainings had different perspectives and had experienced different versions of outcome training, their resulting logic models brought out many interesting aspects of our work. The different logic models also illustrated that the various United Way agencies had different levels of sophistication about outcomes.

The logic model from a larger urban county focused on numbers. The outcomes were written as number clients who obtained civil protection orders, or obtained custody of their children. The outcome indicator was stated as the number of clients who achieved the desired outcome. This logic model was narrowly focused and utilized data that was already fairly easily available. It satisfied the requirements for the funding application, but did not really show how our clients' lives were changed.

In the small rural program, the logic model included outcomes that were highly aspirational, demonstrating substantial community impact, but producing great difficulty in measuring. However, the small rural program United Way did not require outcome indicators so such outcomes as "violence or abuse abated or prevented" could work. This county continued to require us only to report outputs as number of cases and participation on local committees. This logic model illustrated how legal aid had been involved in the community during the previous year.

In the bedroom community United Way, the logic model developed by staff was more closely in line with the outcomes measured by our main benefit codes and client survey and was a good stab at trying to capture what we do for clients. It included an outcome about increasing substantive knowledge of rights and responsibilities. However, it also included an outcome about taking ownership of legal problems, and participating in the assertion of legal rights. These

we later realized were relatively meaningless outcomes, for which we were almost assured to have high percentages of indicators, but which did little to show how we changed clients lives.

Somewhat surprisingly, all of these logic models were well received by the United Way at which they were directed. Although this was good for relations with the individual United Ways, it became problematic as our regional staff began to take more control over reporting and applications. Also, as the region expanded, the sheer number of applications and reports demanded a more uniform system. As well, we recognized that we needed a uniform system if we were going to expand and use it beyond the United Way realm. As logic models and outcome measurement became the norm, rather than the exception, we saw the need to standardize our outcome measurements.

We have faced several challenges in trying to standardize. The first is the history we have developed of certain types of logic models for certain United Ways. There are risks inherent in trying to change a pattern of reporting that has been well received. Mostly, we risk intimating that we understand outcomes better than the local United Way. So we have begun to make the changes in steps and stages.

Another challenge we have faced is whether to really risk saying that we changed lives for fear of making promises we couldn't keep. As we have developed a history of recording main benefit codes and tallying client surveys, we have been pleasantly surprised by the results. We have realized we really can promise to do things like stabilize families and help clients retain housing and have the outcome indicators to prove it.

Our most current version of logic model, which we intend to promulgate, albeit slowly, to all United Ways is below. It incorporates what we liked best from the prior logic models, utilizes our main benefit codes and client surveys, and continues to solidify our message.

#### PROGRAM OUTCOME LOGIC MODEL

INPUTS	ACTIVITIES	OUTPUTS	OUTCOMES
<b>Financial support</b>  <b>Staff:</b> Managing attorney staff attorneys legal assistant paralegal  <b>Volunteers:</b> 21 cases accepted by 11 attorneys. <b>Facility:</b> rented office space in Medina that includes space for	Eligibility Screening a) Provide advice and counsel in family stabilization matters (marriage termination, custody, visitation) b) Provide advice and counsel in housing matters (evictions, foreclosures, conditions, subsidy terminations) c) Provide advice and counsel in public	400 individuals  Advice and counsel a) 50 family cases b) 35 housing cases c) 20 public benefits cases d) 2 domestic violence cases	For the area of law about which they receive advice and counsel, clients will increase knowledge about their rights and responsibilities under the law, and about legal procedures a) family matters b) housing matters c) public benefits d) domestic violence

<p>confidential meetings with clients.</p> <p><b>Equipment:</b> networked computer system with workstations for all employees, internet access, case management system, email system, copier, and phone system.</p> <p><b>Legal research materials:</b> access to core library of general and specialized legal materials, at county law library and internet access to computerized legal research.</p> <p><b>Administrative support:</b> from regional office in Akron that includes financial, resource development and technology.</p>	<p>benefits ( obtain or increase public benefits-OWF, PRC, food stamps, social security, Medicaid, Medicare, etc.)</p> <p>d) Provide advice and counsel in domestic violence matters (Civil Protection Orders, Stalking CPOs)</p> <p>e) Represent in family stabilization matters.</p> <p>f) Represent in housing matters.</p> <p>g) Represent in public benefit proceedings.</p> <p>h) Represent in domestic violence matters.</p> <p>Distribution of Community Education materials</p>	<p>Representation</p> <p>e) 30 family cases</p> <p>f) 20 housing cases</p> <p>g) 20 public benefit cases</p> <p>h) 15 domestic violence cases</p> <p>500 pieces of literature</p>	<p>Clients will receive successful resolution of the legal matter in which they receive representation</p> <p>e) clients family will be stabilized</p> <p>f) clients housing will be retained</p> <p>g) clients public benefits will be obtained or retained</p> <p>h) client will be protected from abuser</p>
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**Recommendation:**

The types of outcomes that might interest LSC are very different than those that interest a United Way. LSC should be very interested in geographic equity and whether the total number of dollars spent per poor person, from all sources, is roughly equivalent across regions, states and nationwide. This is an outcome that I recommend LSC collect.